



Seattle, a Climate of Change: Meeting the Kyoto Challenge

Mayor Nickels' Green Ribbon Commission On Climate Protection

Report and Recommendations: Executive Summary

March 2006

An Urgent Call to Action

There is no longer any question that global warming is happening, and that it is caused in large part by human activities—mainly the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, gasoline, diesel and natural gas. The real question now is: Are we approaching a 'tipping point' at which catastrophic impacts will be unavoidable? More and more experts say "yes," and that strong action is needed now.

Here in the Seattle area, we are already experiencing the impacts of global climate disruption. Our declining mountain snowpack, on which we depend for drinking water and hydroelectricity, is the most conspicuous—and worrisome—example. And, while progress has been made in reducing local contributions to global warming pollution, region-wide emissions are on the rise.

Meeting the Challenge

In creating the Green Ribbon Commission in early 2005, Mayor Greg Nickels gave us a challenging assignment: recommend climate protection actions for the Seattle community to meet or beat the Kyoto target. We examined the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Seattle, reviewed the most promising solutions from other cities, states and companies, and assessed the options against three criteria: potential for reducing emissions, overall feasibility, and catalytic potential—that is, the likelihood that the action would produce multiple benefits here in Seattle, or accelerate action elsewhere.

The Kyoto target is to achieve a seven percent reduction in global warming pollution by 2012, compared to 1990 levels. For Seattle, that means reducing greenhouse gas emissions by about 680,000 tons, the equivalent of taking about 148,000 cars off the roads. Our recommendations, if fully implemented, will exceed that target.

Along with our recommendations, we offer these overarching observations:

- Success will require a deliberate, sustained, community-wide effort. And, since cars and other transportation sources are the largest source of climate pollution in our area, we will need strong regional collaboration as well.
- The actions and investments needed to rein in Seattle's climate pollution will, at the same time, make our community healthier and more livable, for example, by reducing traffic congestion and toxic air pollution from diesel emissions.
- In addition, reducing our reliance on fossil fuels increases our energy independence, keeps more money circulating in the local economy and supports local and regional economic development.
- The road to a more climate-friendly community is paved with economic opportunities, including cost-savings from energy efficiency measures for our families and businesses—especially in light of rising and volatile energy prices—and new business prospects for our companies and entrepreneurs.
- Implementing these recommendations requires a significant investment of time and money by the

community. But we believe the price tag is dwarfed by the cost to our community of not taking additional action.

- Finally, meeting the Kyoto target here—and, more important, transforming Seattle into the nation's most climate-friendly city—is an extraordinary challenge. But our community has rallied to meet such challenges in the past. With Seattle's unique mix of eco-intelligence and entrepreneurial zeal, and Mayor Nickels' continued leadership, we will meet and exceed the goal.



Recommendations

DIRECT ACTION: Reduce Seattle's Dependence on Cars and Cut Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 170,000 Tons

Driving fewer cars and fewer miles is critical to meeting our Kyoto target. Our recommended actions, taken together, will reduce our dependence on passenger vehicles, decrease both air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and create a healthier, more livable and walkable community.

1. Increase the Supply of Frequent, Reliable and Convenient Public Transportation

Efforts underway to improve Seattle's public transportation must be accelerated. Funding must be secured to create new public transportation infrastructure and improve existing services. The City, King County Metro and Sound Transit must work closely together to increase transit efficiency and expand services, in particular moving buses and trains more frequently through high-use areas.

2. Significantly Expand Bicycling and Pedestrian Infrastructure

Biking and walking instead of driving can greatly reduce emissions, save money on fuel and car maintenance and foster a healthier population. The City should double the number of striped bike lanes on arterial streets, complete the urban bike trail system, increase bike parking, and encourage or require new commercial construction to include bike racks, lockers and showers. Seattle should also improve pedestrian crossings in high-priority areas such as school zones, accelerate sidewalk construction and repair, and create a Pedestrian Master Plan.

3. Lead a Regional Partnership to Develop and Implement a Road Pricing System

Charging drivers "user fees" is a powerful tool for reducing traffic and encouraging public transportation. Road pricing can lead to substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions while creating more efficient, safer travel. The City should work with the Washington State Department of Transportation to analyze and, by the end of 2007, recommend a regional tolling system. A portion of the revenues should fund transit service. The City should collaborate with businesses and local and regional governments to raise awareness and support for a regional tolling system.

4. Implement a New Commercial Parking Tax

Parking fees have a strong influence on the number of vehicle trips. They can also provide needed revenue for transit, walking and bicycling networks. Increasing the cost of parking will help reduce the number of vehicles and miles driven in Seattle and consequently, the amount of greenhouse gas emissions. The City should work with the Downtown Seattle Association, commercial parking operators and local businesses to analyze and develop a new parking tax that takes into account impacts on retail businesses, and then develop a proposal for a new parking tax by the end of 2006.

5. Expand Efforts to Create Compact, Green, Urban Neighborhoods

Compact, livable urban neighborhoods attract more people and businesses. Creating such neighborhoods is a critical element of reducing urban sprawl and protecting the climate. The City should adopt redevelopment strategies and zoning policies that channel housing and job growth into Seattle's urban centers and neighborhood business districts to create compact, walkable, bike- and transit-friendly hubs. In particular, the City should implement code changes that allow increased height and density downtown and regulations that not only eliminate minimum parking requirements for new development, but establish a maximum number of allowed spaces.

DIRECT ACTION: Increase Fuel Efficiency and Use of Biofuels and Cut Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 200,000 Tons

Cars, trucks, buses, planes, trains and ships are the biggest source of global warming pollution in our region. We must work to increase fuel efficiency and shift aggressively to more climate-friendly alternatives such as biofuels and electricity.

6. Improve the Average Fuel Efficiency of Seattle's Cars and Trucks

The 400,000 registered vehicles in Seattle are the city's single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. In 2005 Washington State joined other states in adopting California's "clean car standards," which set tailpipe limits on climate pollution. To further increase fuel efficiency, the City should lead a regional partnership to create and implement a targeted public awareness campaign focused on reducing driving and increasing fuel efficiency and use of biofuels. In addition, the City should work with major employers to increase car-sharing, and with King County and the Port of Seattle to improve the fuel efficiency of the regional taxi fleets.

7. Substantially Increase the Use of Biofuels

Seattle is already a leader in supporting the use and development of biofuels, but we can and must do more. Biofuels significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by replacing fossil fuels with cleaner burning substitutes. The City should collaborate with the Port of Seattle, the Clean Air Agency and the Clean Cities Coalition to actively promote biofuel use, particularly in freight-handling and trucking operations. This can be achieved through targeted outreach to major fleet operators and by creating incentives for biofuel vendors and producers to locate in Seattle. The City and the Port should also require contractors to use biodiesel for large projects and create incentives for developers who use biodiesel.

8. Significantly Reduce Emissions from Diesel Trucks, Trains and Ships

A major share of Seattle's climate pollution comes from the freight industry's use of diesel. Freight and trade are an essential and growing part of our economy, and reducing emissions from this sector will reduce toxic air pollution and improve public health. Seattle City Light and the Port of Seattle should locate and provide clean electric power at port facilities for use by cruise ships. The Seattle Department of Transportation, the State Department of Transportation and the Port should work together to improve the efficiency of key truck corridors. The Puget Sound Regional Council should provide more funding for transportation projects that reduce climate pollution. And, the City, the Clean Air Agency, the Port, Washington State Ferries and marine and rail terminal operators should partner on programs to reduce diesel emissions.

DIRECT ACTION: Achieve More Efficient and Cleaner Energy for Our Homes and Businesses and Cut Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 316,000 Tons

Energy efficiency is our best option for reducing global warming pollution from homes and businesses; it's cheaper and cleaner than any existing alternative. Energy conservation and renewable energy resources are critical components of our climate protection strategy.

9. Maintain City Light at Zero Net Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Seattle City Light meets all new electrical demand with conservation and renewable resources and is the first electric utility in the country to achieve zero net greenhouse gas emissions. Maintaining these two policies is the most important climate protection action the City can take.

10. Substantially Increase Natural Gas Energy Conservation

While natural gas is a cleaner burning fuel, it does produce climate pollution. Increasing natural gas efficiency in homes and businesses will decrease greenhouse gas emissions, help avoid the need for more costly power plants, and save on utility bills. Puget Sound Energy should increase its natural gas conservation efforts and collaborate closely with Seattle City Light on conservation services to shared customers. The City's Green Building Program should increase energy efficiency assistance to commercial and residential builders. And, the City should partner with the Building Owners and Managers Association to increase energy efficiency in building operations.

11. Strengthen the State Energy Code

Seattle's effort to increase urban density means building more housing; it is vital that the State Residential Building Code is strengthened to ensure that all of this new housing is energy-efficient. The City should work to ensure that residential building code revisions include improved energy efficiency for both natural gas and electricity.

12. Reduce Seattle Steam's Use of Natural Gas

Seattle Steam Company provides steam for heating and hot water to 175 Seattle customers. By converting about half of its natural gas use to urban wood waste, the company could cut greenhouse gas emissions by about 50,000 tons a year. Once permitting is complete, the City and the Clean Air Agency should work together to assist Seattle Steam during implementation.

POLICY ACTION: Build on Seattle's Leadership

The City must continue to lead by example and engage all of Seattle in the climate protection challenge. But no community is an island. Strong regional, state and federal action is also needed.

13. Continue Seattle's Strong Leadership Example

Seattle City government must continue to lead by example, reducing its own global warming pollution and creating models and inspiration to help others do the same. The City should develop a Seattle Climate Action Plan based on these recommendations and community input. The City should provide adequate funding to develop, implement and monitor the plan.

14. Mobilize the Entire Community

Most of Seattle's global warming pollution comes from our everyday actions, so solutions depend on the participation of all who work and live in Seattle. Our recommended actions should be presented to the community to gather input and to inspire near-term action. A partnership of the Clean Air Agency, Climate Solutions, major employers and the City should develop and launch an intensive, sustained community outreach campaign to inspire climate protection actions.

15. Create the Seattle Climate Partnership

Employers are in a unique position to influence emissions reductions—in their own operations and with their suppliers, customers and workers. The City should take the lead in creating a Seattle Climate Partnership among large employers to reduce global warming pollution and help achieve the community-wide target. The Partnership will create a network of institutions that support each other's success by sharing information, ideas and resources.

16. Leverage Regional and State Action for Climate Solutions

Seattle's leadership is essential, but ultimately, climate protection requires strong action at all levels of government. In partnership with other local jurisdictions, the City should press for strong state and national climate policy. In particular, the State of Washington should adopt specific greenhouse gas reduction targets and timetables, and, in collaboration with business and municipal leaders, develop or participate in a market-based emissions trading system. The City should partner with the Clean Air Agency to promote and facilitate action by communities throughout the



central Puget Sound region. The City should also continue to strengthen the national coalition of cities participating in the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement.

POLICY ACTION: Sustain Our Commitment

This report and these recommendations will be meaningful only if they are implemented, which requires that sufficient resources be directed to the task. In addition, it is critical that progress be regularly measured and reported back to the community.

17. Direct More Resources to the Challenge

Meeting the Kyoto target and sustaining the effort requires significant funding. Some of the recommendations in this report are fully or partially funded. Some are under-funded or not funded at all. Other cities tackling global warming pollution have created dedicated fund sources to implement solutions. The City should include funding for climate protection in its 2007-08 budget. In addition, the Mayor should create a Climate Funding Task Force to develop recommendations for long-term funding options, such as a Climate Protection Fund supported by voluntary contributions, tax revenues or a voter approved levy.

18. Monitor and Report on Progress

To ensure success, it is critical that we measure and report on our progress in reducing Seattle's contributions to climate pollution. The City should develop a monitoring and reporting system that includes community input, and should update its greenhouse gas inventory every three years to measure Seattle's progress in meeting the Kyoto target and against regional trends.

For more information and a link to the complete Green Ribbon Commission report, please visit www.seattle.gov/climate.